



Would Newt Vote for a Muslim?

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January 20, 2012

Newt Gingrich was recently asked by an audience member at a campaign event if he would ever vote for a future Muslim presidential candidate? Gingrich responded:

I think it would depend entirely on whether they would commit in public to give up Sharia. I am totally opposed to Sharia law being accepted by any court in the United States. In fact I favor a federal law that preempts it and says Sharia law will not be used in any court in the United States.

By Shari'a, Gingrich is referring to Islamic law. A common bogeyman among conservatives in since 2010 has been the alleged threat emanating from Shari'a; the notion that unsavory Muslims in the United States are working surreptitiously to institute Islamic law in the American legal system. The campaign by proponents of the "Shari'a threat" as part of the "Stealth Jihad" often cite the obscure writings of fringe groups who dream up far-fetched scenarios for an "Islamization" of the United States. These writings are amplified and falsely presented as representatives of Muslims, at home and aboard. Agitators of the "Shari'a threat" further seek to link nearly every Muslim-American organization to radical foreign groups in an effort to make suspect the very political mobilization of American Muslims and thus achieve what detractors charge is the real goal: marginalization of Muslims in America.

That argument is often augmented with reference to a 2009 New Jersey case where a judge refused to honor a restraining order requested by a Moroccan spouse against her husband citing marital rape. The judge argued that the husband's expectation that his wife submit to sex coincides with his religious beliefs. "Shari'a threat" promoters seized on the ruling to argue that it was an example of "Islamic law" being recognized in Americans court and an early portent necessitating state and federal laws, per Gingrich's own statement. But the ruling was overturned by an appeals court, which granted the restraining order. There are no other incidents of the religious sensibility of a Muslim being taken into consideration by a judge.

The "Shari'a threat" crowd may not believe what they parrot - knowing that given both the slight political power of Muslims and the negligible demographics (around 1%) of the community, Shari'a in America even if it were a serious objective - and there is no evidence that Muslims in America aspire to live under religious dictates - is not plausible. Many are animated by anti-Muslim animus and a desire for aggressive policies in Arab/Muslim nations, and as a consequence have found a digestible bit of propaganda that can be easily understood in a catchy slogan. Akin to the "Red Menace" of the 1950s. The anxiety of many Americans after 9/11 and two wars in Muslims lands, Afghanistan and Iraq, along with the unending political rhetoric about "America being under attack" has cultivated a receptive audience for such rhetoric that is politically useful since it may yield credence to

hawkish policies in the Middle East. That would be ironic. As [libertarian scholar Leon Hadar, resident at the Cato Institute](#), has written, "The suggestion that Muslims are invading America and trying to force their values and law on us seems to be a form of projection bias—attributing our own impulses to the other side. We want to control Muslims in the Middle East, and we blame the Muslims for planning to control us here at home."

Although Mitt Romney and Ron Paul have avoided anti-Muslim insinuations, Newt Gingrich has been a vociferous spokesperson for anti-Muslim causes. Shortly after making the above statement, Gingrich reminded the audience of his opposition to an Islamic community center in lower Manhattan (the so-called "Ground Zero Mosque"); calling the ongoing project "a deliberate and willful insult to the people of the United States who suffered an attack by people who are motivated by the same thing."

Many Republicans and conservatives cheer such fiery oratory, but perhaps they should consider the admonition of Hadar:

sowing fear of a monolithic Islam serves the interests of our client states, defense contractors, and lobbyists who press for rising defense budgets and further military interventions. This anti-Islam narrative is also promoted by Republican activists and conservative-movement pundits who hope that like the Red Menace of old, the specter of a Green Peril could serve as a unifying force for the political right. But this kind of policy would only end up overextending the military, ballooning deficits, and devastating our economic base. That's exactly the kind of tea that conservatives and libertarians have sworn not to drink.